

## Waldorf Education in Argentina, a new IASWECE Member Country

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Thanks to the seed of light sown humbly by Waldorf education many years ago by our pioneers and the ever-present help of the spiritual world, Argentina has joined IASWECE as a new member this year. Just as the star of Waldorf early childhood education guides us on our path, we know that joining this global network will illuminate our work with children with new strength.

Below we will attempt to paint a picture of our country with a few brushstrokes of colour.

In South America, Argentina unfolds like a tapestry of cultures, woven with threads of resilience and adaptation. A melting pot of races with a history of cultural enrichment. Argentina, the silver country, gets its name from the Latin word *argentum*. In the 16th century, two Europeans, Solís and Gaboto, were searching for silver and precious stones and had heard that they would find these treasures in this area. They sailed to a very wide, sparkling river, which they named Río de La Plata.

### A land of contrasts

The Argentine Republic is located at the southern tip of America and is one of the southernmost countries in the

world. The longest stretch of land reaches 3,700 kilometres and the widest point is 1,700 kilometres. It consists of a vast continental expanse, an insular portion with a series of oceanic islands and a sector in Antarctica.

As the second largest country in South America and the eighth largest in the world, it has a population of 46,234,830 inhabitants, distributed unevenly between large cities such as the capital, Buenos Aires, and the different natural regions.

The Andes mountain range runs through the country from north to south like a backbone. In its immensity stands the snow-capped peak of the highest mountain in America, the Aconcagua, at 6,962 metres high. On one side, this mountain range forms a natural and political border with neighbouring Chile to the west, and on the other, it connects and unites us with all the Andean cultures.

The vast expanse, proximity to the sea and imposing presence of the Andes give Argentina a wide range of climates. The landscapes are very varied: from green and extensive plains to deserts; from cold forests to thick tropical jungles; from low-lying areas with lagoons to snow-capped mountain heights. These colourful and diverse ecosystems generate a wealth of natural resources.

In contrast to the snow-capped peaks, the wonder of the Iguazú Falls in the northeast shines in all its splendour in the warm sunlight, attracting millions of tourists from all over the world.

In the centre of this unique colourful picture lies the Pampa region. It is humid towards the east, with extensive plains where cereals are grown and cattle are raised. And dry towards the west, with small-leaved, thorny trees adapted to the drought growing on stony soil.

Finally, in the south of the country lies the magnificent and beautiful Patagonia, a predominantly dry and desert region, rich in sheep and oil. At its southernmost tip, shining like a star in the dark night, is Ushuaia, considered the southernmost city in the world.

### **Argentina: A melting pot of cultures throughout history**

The history of Argentina is a journey through time, marked by the diversity of peoples and cultures that have left their mark on the country. Before the arrival of Europeans, its territory was inhabited by various indigenous cultures such as the Mapuche, Guaraní, Diaguita and Comechingones, among others, each with their own way of life and worldview.

Spanish colonisation in the 16th century imposed new political, economic and social structures, leading to a process of cultural transformation and miscegenation. Over time, the struggles for independence gave way to the construction of a national identity in the 19th century.

One of the most distinctive features of Argentina compared to other South American countries was the large wave of European immigration between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Millions of Italians, Spaniards, English, French, Germans, Poles and other Europeans arrived in the country, shaping its culture, economy and identity. Later, there were also Arab and Jewish migrations that added to the cultural diversity.

In recent decades, new migratory flows from Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela have further enriched Argentina's identity, creating a cultural mosaic that is unique in the American continent.

Today, Argentina is a true melting pot of races, where indigenous, European and Latin American traditions coexist. This diversity is reflected in its cuisine, music, literature and way of life as a society. The country's language is Spanish. Unlike other South American countries with a predominantly indigenous or mestizo population, Argentina's identity is marked by a strong European influence combined with a constant reinterpretation of its original and Latin American roots. This mixture of cultures is what makes Argentina a country with a unique identity in America, constantly evolving and open to new influences.

### **Waldorf education in Argentina: a seed of light**

In 1938, during the Second World War, three teachers arrived from Europe and settled in Florida, in Greater Buenos Aires: Eli Lunde, Ingeborg Knapper and Herbert Schulte Kersmeke. In 1940, they founded a playgroup with five children. This was the beginning of the first Rudolf Steiner School.







From 1954 onwards, more teachers who had trained in Waldorf education in Germany or Switzerland began to arrive. In 1960, more families from the neighbourhood approached the school. They were immigrants or descendants of immigrants and were interested in the German language, which the founders spoke fluently. A search began for a unique identity that would integrate the Waldorf pedagogy learned in Germany and other European countries with the culture and roots of Argentina.

In 1967, a major crisis occurred and a new school, 'San Miguel Arcángel', was born.

In 1980, many families interested in anthroposophy began to arrive and the two schools grew significantly. At the same time, initiatives for Waldorf kindergartens and schools began to emerge in other parts of Greater Buenos Aires.

The Waldorf kindergarten movement in Argentina continued to develop slowly but steadily from 2001 to the present day, in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Córdoba and other regions. The seeds of light sown by the pioneers of Waldorf education spread, grew and bore fruit in the fertile soil of Argentina.

### **The work in the kindergartens**

Rhythm is cultivated in all kindergartens. The annual rhythm allows children to enjoy the seasons and Christian festivals, which in Argentina occur in a different season from the Northern Hemisphere, as Argentina is located in the Southern Hemisphere.

In our country, the forces of the earth are very present, especially as one moves away from the big cities into the vast territory of Argentina. These influences of the earth permeate the inhabitants' experience and way of life.

During some of his visits, Helmut Von Kügelgen said that festivals are universal. That is why he asked that nature be observed: to discover what it shows and thus be able to form an image related to the celebration.

Another topic that has been the focus of study and research for some time is school readiness, the moment when a child is ready to enter primary school. In Argentina, children start school at the age of five-and-a-half in state schools.

### **Challenges and achievements**

One of the biggest challenges in our country is the economy. This makes it difficult for schools to plan and prepare budgets, and it is almost impossible to save money. Teachers do not receive salaries commensurate with their work.

Despite these challenges, some of the kindergartens already have their own premises or are building them, thanks to strong community work and help from families.



There have been significant achievements in the area of education. Teachers from different kindergartens in each region meet regularly throughout the year, and national meetings are organised every two years. They also have the opportunity to train for the early years level in Waldorf education seminars in Argentina, which are held in person:

- Initial Training in Waldorf Education, in the capital, Buenos Aires, and in Posadas, in Misiones Province.
- Seminar on Waldorf Education in Córdoba (kindergarten orientation), in Córdoba province, with regional centres in Rosario in Santa Fe province, and in the provinces of Mendoza, Salta and La Pampa.

The history of Argentina is a testament to the human capacity to unite in times of adversity. As Rudolf Steiner said, 'Human beings can unite in community activity even in times when everything is falling apart.' Waldorf education, with its social focus on community and cooperation, has found a place in this country where cultural diversity and resilience have given rise to a unique identity.

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